# The Report of the Accreditation Visiting Team

## Box Elder Middle School 18 South 500 East Brigham City, Utah 84302

November 5-6, 2003



Utah State Office of Education 250 East 500 South P.O. Box 144200 Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200

## THE REPORT OF THE VISITING TEAM REVIEWING

## **Box Elder Middle School**

18 South 500 East Brigham City, UT 84302

November 5-6, 2003

#### **UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION**

Steven O. Laing, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

### DIVISION OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL SUCCESS

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Salt Lake City, Utah

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#### **FOREWORD**

A major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate inservice growth and school improvement. Consequently, requirements include not only meeting the standards of the Utah State Office of Education, but also completing a school evaluation every six years.

School evaluation is that effort by the local school staff to take a comprehensive look at the school's program, operation, and effect. The school determines how closely its purposes and philosophy coincide with its actual practices and the degree to which its stated objectives are being reached. It is a three-phased program: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, November 5-6, 2003, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to meet the requirements referred to above

The entire staff of Box Elder Middle School is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the Visiting Team. The excellent leadership given by Principal Terry Jackson is commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for the generally fine program being provided for Box Elder Middle School students, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more adequately meet the needs of the students of Box Elder Middle School.

Steven O. Laing, Ed.D. State Superintendent of Public Instruction

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## DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION

| Martell Menlove   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| Bob Jenson        | Director, Applied Technology Education     |
| Jay Stuart        | Director, Student Services                 |
| Mary Kay Kirkland | Curriculum Director                        |
| Ron Frandsen      | Business Manager                           |
| Jim Baty          |  |
| Jean Cannon       | Supervisor, Transportation and Maintenance |
| Kathy Hansen      | Supervisor, School Lunch                   |

## **BOX ELDER MIDDLE SCHOOL**

## **ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF**

## **School Administration**

| Terry Jackson      | Principal                             |  |  |  |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Jason Sparks       | 1                                     |  |  |  |
| 1                  | 1                                     |  |  |  |
|                    |                                       |  |  |  |
| <u>Counseli</u>    | Counseling                            |  |  |  |
| Chrys Deatry       | Counselor                             |  |  |  |
| Scott Monson       |                                       |  |  |  |
| Teresa Thompson    |                                       |  |  |  |
| •                  |                                       |  |  |  |
| Support Staff      |                                       |  |  |  |
|                    |                                       |  |  |  |
| Pamela Anderson    | · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · |  |  |  |
| Tammie Christensen | 1                                     |  |  |  |
| Jodie Nelson       | 2                                     |  |  |  |
| Rhonda Leonard     | <u> </u>                              |  |  |  |
| ViAnn Wadsworth    |                                       |  |  |  |
| Daleine Allen      | ± ±                                   |  |  |  |
| Jan Asay           |                                       |  |  |  |
| Sherry Bingham     |                                       |  |  |  |
| Diane Crump        |                                       |  |  |  |
| Debra Firth        |                                       |  |  |  |
| Janalyn Godfrey    | •                                     |  |  |  |
| Marsha Haynie      | <u> </u>                              |  |  |  |
| Marilyn Hunsaker   | •                                     |  |  |  |
| Brenda Marble      | •                                     |  |  |  |
| Char Wells         | •                                     |  |  |  |
| Gladys Wilson      | -                                     |  |  |  |
| Eva Bird           | Cook                                  |  |  |  |
| Marianna Broadus   | Lunch Clerk                           |  |  |  |
| Brenda Couch       |                                       |  |  |  |
| Juanita Garza      | Cook                                  |  |  |  |
| Vena Howard        | Cook                                  |  |  |  |
| Barbara Kraus      | Cook                                  |  |  |  |
| Jimi Wright        | Cook                                  |  |  |  |
| Debra Yearsley     | Cook                                  |  |  |  |
| Howard Anderson    | Custodian                             |  |  |  |

| Larry Bradshaw  | Custodian |
|-----------------|-----------|
| James Cumins    | Custodian |
| Kirk Hansen     | Custodian |
| Alvin Hunsaker  | Custodian |
| Robert Westover | Custodian |

### **Faculty**

Marie Andrus Mandi Green Jill Olpin Karla Parsons Julie Armstrong Sandra Harris Ann Bailey Brent Hollingsworth Tammy Salerno Ronda Bickmore Laurie Hyde Arlene Schulze Tracey Jenson Jacob Bishop Karen Smith Gardner Jeppesen Ernest Blankenship Susan Sutton Shea Bradshaw Carol Johnston Ann Thackeray Wayne Burrell Keven Kendall **Rob Thomas** Megan Bushnell Chad Kirby Jay Thomson Pamela Butterweck David Lee Jami Vernon Lynette Checketts Gayla Ward Louis Lucero Sheldon Cheshire John Madsen J. Paul Ward Susan Cox Marsha Martz Meridee Webb Grover Wilhelmsen Joette Craig Emily McBride Katherine Enright Wayne McConkie Matt Williams Randall Gilbert Janet Meyer Kathryn Wouden

#### **BOX ELDER MIDDLE SCHOOL**

#### MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Box Elder Middle School is to help students develop individual learning skills and effective communication skills, to help them gain basic knowledge, to encourage effective participation in a democratic society, and teach students how to be responsible citizens who promote personal and public good.

### **BELIEF STATEMENTS**

Box Elder Middle School Belief Statements:

- All students can learn.
- A safe and physically comfortable environment promotes student learning.
- A student's self esteem is enhanced by positive relationships and mutual respect among and between students and staff.
- Students lean in different ways and should be provided with a variety of instructional approaches to support their learning.
- Students learn best when students, teachers, and parents work together in the shared responsibilities.
- Each student is a valued individual with unique physical, social, emotional and intellectual needs.
- Students learn best when they are actively engaged in the learning environment.

### MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Jim McKim, Dixie Middle School, Washington School District, Visiting Team Chairperson

Doug Bingham, Wasatch Junior High School, Granite School District

Jim Brey, Dixie Middle School, Washington School District

Cindy Maw, Weber High School, Weber School District

Mark Whitaker, West Hills Middle School, Jordan School District

#### VISITING TEAM REPORT

#### **BOX ELDER MIDDLE SCHOOL**

#### **CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE**

Box Elder Middle School is a rural middle school of 994 students located in Brigham City, Utah. It draws its students from Brigham City and the outlying areas of Bear River City, Corrine, Honeyville, Mantua, Perry, and Willard. Box Elder Junior High opened its doors in 1966 and changed its name to Box Elder Middle School in 1984. In the past nine years, the student population has fluctuated between 1,100 and 969. Depending on the school's student enrollment, Box Elder Middle School generally employees between 49 and 52 teachers.

The community served by Box Elder Middle School is comprised of middle class suburban and rural single-family homes. However, last year 31 percent of the students received compensatory assistance. It was also noted that the Hispanic student population rose from 48 in 2001 to 76 in 2003.

a) What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?

The administration team has made significant efforts to gather and collect student achievement data available to the school. In particular, they looked at four years of SAT scores, drawing comparisons among Box Elder Middle School, the school district, and the state, with some data disaggregated according to gender. Math SAT scores revealed that Box Elder Middle School is achieving above district and state averages and has set and maintained a high standard of excellence. Five years of CRT scores were disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. No information was given for comparison to the district and state. It was interesting to note that scores within the Science Department showed a great contrast with one another: Earth Science revealed an increase in scores, and Integrated Science showed a decrease in scores. (It should be noted that part of the reason for the increase in scores for Earth Science from 2002 to 2003 was the deletion of the Biology course that used to be taught in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade.) The performance data in the math subject area indicates that the male gender scores slightly higher than the female gender. However, the entire Math Department needs to be commended for maintaining a high level of near mastery performance.

The administrative team needs to be commended for the implementation of the School-Wide Management Policy. It was found that this newly established policy is helping students achieve self-discipline. From the data that was collected, it is evident that the policy is working. Three

years ago the number of severe behavior violations was much more excessive than the mischievous behavior violations. According to the administration, this trend has begun to shift in a positive direction. The number of severe behavior infractions has consistently decreased since the advent of the policy. The Visiting Team recommends that the administration stay the course of the schoolwide behavior standards policy with vested support of all stakeholders.

In reference to the surveys taken, it is evidenced by the responses of all stakeholders that substance abuse and sexual harassment are profound issues that need to be addressed. It is noted that 92 percent of the teachers, 80 percent of the parents, and 74 percent of the students perceive that there is a substance abuse problem at Box Elder Middle School. In addition to this, 95 percent of the teachers, 73 percent of the parents, and 54 percent of the students believe that sexual harassment is of equal concern. The school recognizes the need to address these two concerns through the behavior policy that has been implemented, and by their attempt to make it an action plan goal.

b) What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?

Box Elder Middle School is strongly encouraged to continue its efforts to systematically collect and analyze pertinent student data to guide decisions made by the school. It is suggested that the administrative staff collaborate with the district in designing an effective management system that can be utilized by different stakeholders within the school community. This effort should extend to data not included in the profile. Summaries of disaggregated data, reflections of the process, attendance records, disciplinary referrals, and comparisons to the district and state in the CRTs would provide additional information that the staff could utilize in identifying student achievement gaps by subgroups (e.g., gender, ethnicity, grade level, socioeconomic status) and monitoring the effectiveness of school improvement activities over time.

#### **Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:**

- In an effort to identify specific student achievement gaps, both the CRT and SAT 9 scores should be disaggregated by content cluster and quintile (mastery, near mastery, partial mastery, and minimal) for each grade level and, if possible, by gender and ethnicity. It is recommended that summaries be included to help identify both strengths and achievement gaps.
- It is suggested by the Visiting Team that the school take a closer look at the significant findings of the profile and then make a more true alignment with the

action plan. Upon the writing of a more specific action plan that has measurable and observable goals, future data collected will provide greater insight to all stakeholder opinions, student achievement gaps, professional development, and the overall culture of continuous improvement.

• In analyzing student achievement data, the staff should pursue exploring possible correlations between student achievement and other measures of student success, such as attendance, course grades, participation in school activities and clubs, etc. Some questions that might drive further inquiry may include: Do we have students who attend regularly, but are not performing? Are there patterns or trends in attendance and achievement that can be attributed to grade level and gender, grade level and ethnicity, or grade level and subject area?

#### **CHAPTER 2: THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS**

a) To what extent has the school community engaged in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?

The Box Elder Middle School administration has made a concerted effort to engage the various stakeholders in a collaborative self-study process. All members of the staff and administration serve on interdisciplinary committees or focus groups. The administration facilitated the gathering and analysis of the student achievement data and survey results, identified school improvement goals, and wrote the action plan. Although parents and students were invited to participate, representation from these stakeholders was limited.

Despite the exemplary efforts on the part of the administration, focus group chairs, department heads, and staff, the *Collaborating for Student Achievement* self-study process was not fully employed by the school. The Visiting Team recognizes that the school and leadership made a sincere effort to do a thorough analysis of the school's strengths and limitations and commends them for their efforts.

The Visiting Team recommends that the administration and future leadership team establish further collaboration with parents about the self-evaluation process, and how the action plan and the DRSLs will drive the school improvement process. It was evident from the interviews with parents and community members that many questions still exist concerning the purpose and the process.

b) To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?

Many of the school's strengths and limitations were not listed in the existing profile. Additional data and analysis are required to pinpoint achievement gaps, student concerns, and potential improvement targets. It is recommended that a narrative accompany the data found in the profile, identifying strengths and limitations that are recognizes from the analysis of the profile.

Box Elder Middle School has initiated steps for improving its profiling efforts for the future.

## CHAPTER 3: INSTRUCTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Box Elder Middle School's desired results for student learning (DRSLs) are as follows:

- 1. An effective communicator successfully interacts with others using a variety of mediums, e.g. reading, writing, speaking, listening, painting, playing instruments, singing, dancing, dramatizing, and sculpting.
- 2. A lifelong learner has gained basic knowledge and developed the individual learning skills that support continuous education, encourage effective participation in a democratic society and maximize employment opportunities.
- 3. A responsible citizen participates in the local and world communities to promote personal and public good.

#### Shared Vision, Beliefs, Mission, and Goals:

a) To what extent did the school facilitate a collaborative process to build a shared vision for the school (mission) that defines a compelling purpose and direction for the school?

The administration and faculty at Box Elder Middle School have begun an effective collaborative process to define the school's shared vision, beliefs, mission, and goals. The members of the faculty, under the direction of the administration, were involved in the original draft and revisions. This is evident from the fact that the mission statement is aligned with the belief statements, and that the faculty continue to use it as reference for their collaborative efforts.

The Visiting Team has recognized the strength in all stakeholders and encourages increased input from all stakeholders (parents, support staff, and students); it would be best to seek consensus and utilize the strength of these stakeholders.

b) To what extent has the school defined a set of beliefs that reflect the commitment of the administration and staff to support student achievement and success?

It was evident to the Visiting Team that the actions of the administration and faculty support a safe and comfortable learning environment where students and teachers respect each other. The continued and persistent efforts of the administration are having a positive impact on the learning environment and relationships between teachers and students. Additionally, the teachers demonstrated support for the belief statements in their interactions with their students.

c) To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's desired results for student learning (DRSLs)?

It is clear that the DRSLs are aligned with the mission and belief statements and are the driving force in developing student outcomes. The mission, beliefs, and DRSLs reflect the school's commitment to the needs of the young adolescent. The school is developing a plan to articulate and integrate the DRSLs into curriculum and instruction.

### **Curriculum Development:**

a) To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards and the Utah Core Curriculum (with inclusion of the Utah Life Skills)?

Within the individual departments, it is apparent that the staff is working collaboratively to align their curricula with the State Core Curriculum. It is important to assure that the written curriculum, the taught curriculum, and the assessed curriculum be aligned with each other. A concern that was expressed by the administration was the need for the staff to have a "laser focus" on the State Core Curriculum in planning and developing strategies for implementation and teaching the State Core Curriculum in each of the subject areas. Schoolwide and departmental data should clarify additional student learning needs and drive further curriculum development. To help further the drive for effective curriculum development, the administration has trained the staff on research-based "best practices." The Visiting Team recognizes and applauds those faculty members who go above and beyond traditional styles and move toward more research-based strategies for increasing student achievement.

b) To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's desired results for student learning?

The Visiting Team was impressed by the display of the DRSLs in all rooms throughout the school. These posters provide a constant reminder of the unified focus on student achievement. Examples of these efforts include training in the

Six Traits of Writing (and the posters), CRISS training and procedures, Boys Town Reading, and the professional library. There is strong evidence of collaboration within the departments, but the Visiting Team would recommend more collaboration across the curriculum and among all the departments.

#### **Quality Instructional Design:**

a) To what extent does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students?

It is evident that some of the school's staff members use a variety of learning experiences to actively engage the students in the learning process. The majority of the teaching activities were of a traditional nature – lecture followed by independent student work. Instructional strategies and learning activities are aligned with many of the instructional goals, but some teachers do not feel totally comfortable with alternative instructional methods. The Visiting Team encourages the use of a variety of teaching methods to increase student achievement.

b) To what extent does the professional staff employ a variety of instructional strategies to ensure the needs of different learners are met?

The faculty of Box Elder Middle School has periodically assessed the results of student learning. Adjustments or modifications to the instructional process are made to address students with special needs on an occasional basis. The administration has provided inservice for the staff in "best practices." The Visiting Team recommends that the staff continue to explore and utilize these practices in their classrooms. This will bring about higher levels of understanding and increase student achievement across the curriculum.

c) To what extent do the professional staff and leadership provide additional opportunities which support student learning?

The staff and leadership show evidence of many opportunities which support student learning, such as teacher availability before and after school and during personal lunch breaks, and the efforts to reach at-risk students through the tracking program and "school within a school" program.

The Visiting Team recommends that additional strategies, programs, and resources be researched to address areas of concern and impact such as diverse needs, "No Child Left Behind" requirements, etc.

#### **Quality Assessment Systems:**

a) To what extent has the staff developed classroom or schoolwide assessments based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?

A limited effort is made to clearly define the type of the achievement to be assessed and the performance standards for evaluating the quality of students' achievement prior to developing assessments of student learning.

Few assessment are directly linked to specific instructional uses that promote students' achievement and continuous improvement of their learning.

It is recommended that efforts be made to create assessments of student learning that are aligned the with the essential knowledge, skills, and performance standards for student learning.

b) To what extent are assessments of student learning developed using methods that reflect the intended purpose and performance standards?

The following assessments were observed during the classroom visits: openended questions, projects, portfolio use, oral presentations, group assignments, selected response, and peer groups. In the short time that the Visiting Team was in the classrooms, the frequency of the use of each of these tools could not be determined.

Few assessments are directly linked to specific instructional uses that promote students' achievement. It appears that classroom assessment focuses more on a student's grade than on the degree of learning in the classroom by the each student.

c) To what extent are assessments designed, developed, and used in a fair and equitable manner?

There is limited evidence that a clear definition of fair and equitable assessment exists.

It is recommended that continued research and efforts be made to reach all students, including but not limiting special needs, ESL and at-risk students. A more in-depth collection and study of disaggregated data in these areas will identify fairness of assessment centering on equal access to knowledge for all students in all classes.

#### **Leadership for School Improvement:**

a) To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning?

The Visiting Team commends the administration for recognizing the need for continuous improvement of the academic learning climate and teaching practices. The administration has assumed the main role of the school improvement leadership. Parents on the Community Council have assumed some of the responsibility of leadership in an effort to improve the school on behalf of the students. Some members of the teaching staff have also assumed a leadership role by delivering professional development opportunities for their colleagues. Examples of this are the Six-Traits Writing, CRISS training, and facilitation of Boys Town Reading by members of the faculty. The administration has presented inservice training to the staff on "best practices" and "Understanding by Design" (or the Backwards Assessment Model). It was unanimously believed among the department chairs that the trainings have elevated the school's commitment to improving the instructional process, and therefore improving student achievement. The Visiting Team feels it is important to student outcomes that continued focus in this area be a priority.

b) To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative?

The administration at Box Elder Middle School has gone to great lengths to employ effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative. This commitment to move the organization in this direction is one of the school's greatest strengths.

However, it is the Visiting Team's recommendation that the administration-driven process be transferred to a teacher-driven model, with representation from the community and student body to make up a leadership team. This teacher-driven model empowers the staff to take ownership of the schoolwide improvement change.

c) To what extent does the school leadership monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness through a comprehensive assessment system and continuous reflection?

Currently the standardized test data is being used to analyze student achievement on a yearly basis. Therefore, it is the Visiting Team's recommendation that the school utilize additional tools and assessments on a more frequent basis to measure and track student progress in achieving the DRSLs.

d) To what extent does the school leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources of the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment?

The leadership of the school provides skillful leadership. Most of the schoolwide policies and operational procedures are consistent with the school's beliefs and mission and are designed to maximize opportunities for successful learning. The leadership has established the foundations for collaborative decision making and routinely seeks input from key stakeholders.

e) To what extent does the school leadership make decisions related to the allocation and use of resources which align with the school goals, the achievement of the DRSLs, and school improvement efforts?

The decisions related to the usage and allocation of resources usually take into account the school's goals. Not all departments in the school feel like they are receiving equitable disbursement of resources. The administration should conduct a needs assessment for each department.

The assignment and use of resources (e.g., human resources, time as a resource for learning, physical resources, instructional resources, financial resources) are aligned with the school's goals.

f) To what extent does the school leadership empower the school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning?

The school leadership has made a concerted effort to incorporate parents and students into the decision-making process. The Community Council and the standing school improvement committee provide opportunities to involve the stakeholders.

The SEOP process, student handbook, school website, student newspaper, and KBUZZ television and radio stations are a few of the methods employed by Box Elder Middle School to reach students, parents, and the community.

## **Community Building:**

a) To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?

Positive and productive working relationships are established among students, teachers, support staff, and administrators. Evidence indicates that most students feel themselves to be a part of the school community, and feel welcome to participate in school activities, organizations, and clubs. Students view the staff as

being supportive and eager to assist them with their individual needs. Teachers support each other through mentoring and coaching programs, study groups, social gatherings, and intra-department meetings. There appears to be cooperation and collegiality within the departments. However, the Visiting Team feels there is a need to build upon and expand collaborative relationships and cooperation among academic and vocational departments throughout the school.

b) To what extent does the school extend the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning?

Evidence indicates that the school is aware that parental involvement is a critical component. It is clear that efforts are being made to include parents in the operations of Box Elder Middle School. For example, parents facilitate Table Talk (a program that encourages communication between parents and students), Reality Town, literacy programs, and business partnerships. The counseling center is providing classes in parenting, Love and Logic, and the Why Try program. The school communicates with the stakeholders in a variety of ways, including newly added classroom telephones, voice messaging, accessible websites, and e-mail. Parents are encouraged to attend PTA meetings and parent-teacher conferences offered throughout the year. The Visiting Team recommends that the school explore additional avenues to improve parent-school communication. Possibilities may include mailing midterms, reinstating Back-to-School Night, introducing a monthly PTA newsletter, etc.

### **Culture of Continuous Improvement and Learning:**

a) To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs focused on the school's goals for improvement?

The school's organizational system and culture are supportive of school improvement and professional development. Teachers and administrators meet weekly for professional development meetings, and many members of the faculty are trainers for district classes/programs. The professional staff has identified the need to spend more time on the curriculum, while maintaining an emphasis on instruction and management. The school should be commended for creating an atmosphere in which collaboration is fostered among many members of the faculty. This opportunity for collaboration and growth should be extended to all staff members.

b) To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?

It is evident that the school administration actively supports individual and staff opportunities for teacher development. It is clear to the Visiting Team that Box

Elder Middle School provides a positive and nurturing culture for both the students and the teachers. Various professional activities have been implemented (Six Traits of Writing, CRISS, teacher and mentor academy), and in the creation of their professional library. This is also evidenced in the staff's buy-in of the self-study process. The Visiting Team recommends that future professional development should focus on the DRSLs selected by the staff, and should be aligned with the action plan and State Core Curriculum guidelines.

## CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) STANDARDS I-XI

These standards are not applicable to Box Elder Middle School. Most public junior/middle schools are not accredited through NAAS, but only through the USOE – it is their choice to join NAAS or not.

#### CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS – ACTION PLAN

- a) To what extent is the schoolwide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up?
  - It is evident that the action plan attempts to align improvement efforts with the school's DRSLs rather than specific student achievement gaps. The Visiting Team recommends that the school action plan reflect more observable and measurable goals in order to facilitate higher student achievement.
- b) To what extent is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, schoolwide and systemwide?
  - The Visiting Team observed a high level of commitment to the school improvement process. The faculty met regularly to determine its current reality and future goals. It continues to meet to improve instructional and management strategies.
  - The current plan will require some revision in order to articulate specific objectives with criteria and a timeline, which would provide the "laser focus" needed to reach the level of excellence that the school is striving to achieve.
- c) How sound does the follow-up process that the school intends to use for monitoring the accomplishments of the schoolwide action plan appear to be?

The current action plan does not articulate an effective method of monitoring the accomplishments of the schoolwide action plan. As a result of the site visit, the administrative team understands the importance of collecting and using data to monitor the school's progress. The current action plan will require some revision to reflect the recommendation of the Visiting Team.

## CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

#### **Commendations:**

- The Visiting Team was impressed with the commitment of the staff to teaching writing across the curriculum. The fact that all teachers were trained in the Six Traits of Writing, and that many of them implemented writing in their curricula shows that the faculty is serious about improving communication, as stated in the DRSLs and the action plan.
- From classroom visits and personal discussions with teachers and students, it was evident that there was a strong positive relationship between them. Many of the students expressed that their favorite thing about Box Elder Middle School was the teachers. Teachers and students expressed mutual respect.
- The Visiting Team observed that most of the faculty has bought into the school improvement process. This was evidenced in the amount of collaboration and input that went into the department analysis, the focus groups, and the development of the DRSLs. Also, it was noted that there was a high level of collaboration within the departments.
- The Visiting Team appreciated the positive climate that was prevalent throughout the school. This was due in part to the proactive leadership of the administration, and in part to the efforts of the teachers in creating a nurturing learning atmosphere in the classrooms.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Priority should be given to refining and explaining the data found in the school profile. Including a narrative of the data findings identifying the strengths and achievement gaps would greatly benefit the staff as they refine and implement their action plan.
- The Visiting Team encourages the departments to increase the level of collaboration **between** departments. It is recognized, however, that this may be

difficult under the time constraints of the school's current schedule. The Visiting Team recommends that the faculty at Box Elder Middle School investigate ways it can increase the amount of collaborative planning time.

• Collaboration needs to continue in order to develop a curriculum that has a "laser focus" on the key components of the State Core Curriculum. Teachers should concentrate their efforts on enduring understanding and effective assessment practices.